

Tips to Starting a Walking Group

Calling all walkers: Starting a walking group does not need to take much time or effort. Here's what you need to do:

- Advertise: Post flyers in your local library, recreation, community center, senior center, health club, cafeteria at work or place of worship. Take advantage of free calendar listings in local newspapers or newsletters. The flyers should invite interested walkers to a meeting and give people a day, time and place. Choose a public meeting place like the library or neighborhood coffee shop. You also could include an email or telephone number for people to contact you.

Hold a meeting: At your first meeting, listen to what the group has to say. Then decide together:

- How many times a week the group will walk
- Where you will walk
- What time you will meet and how far you will go

You might want to scope and **map out several different routes**. You can increase the distance as you go along.

You'll also want to set some **guidelines**:

- Will you walk if it's raining or snowing?
- Does the group want to walk both indoors and outdoors?
- Do you want to ban cell phones and headphones during walks?
- Do you want to have regular meetings?
- Will members call one another if someone can't make it, or will the group just walk with whoever shows up? You can make the group as formal or informal as you like.

Other things you might want to discuss include dressing for the weather, warming up and cooling down and recording and tracking progress.

Finally, demonstrate **proper walking techniques**: arms swinging, chest high, stomach in, back straight and rolling from heel to toe on both feet.

Before the meeting ends, create a telephone tree so team members can contact each other. Include email addresses.

Get organized: Once your team is up and walking, you might want to get more organized. here are some of the things you can do:

- Give your team a name and have T-shirts or visors made.
- Elect officers.
- Enter charity walkathons, community parades or 5K races together.

- Have coffee or lunch after your walks. Spin off a dinner club or book club. Organize an all-day or weekend walk to explore a new place (a historic site, big city, part of the Appalachian Trail).
- Start a newsletter.
- Organize a community walk to get others interested in walking. You can partner with a local hospital or other community organization to increase support and participation.

These kinds of activities can help your team stay interested and motivated. Motivation might start to dwindle over time, but this is normal. People often find that one of the biggest challenges they face with any fitness program is sticking with it over the long haul.

Source: AARP in conjunction with the Corporation for National and Community Service